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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the idea that aspirants in the field of educational administration, particularly females, may be remiss in assessing both the capabilities they bring to the field and their individual chances of finding work there. Perceptions of the subjects were studied via survey research in three main areas: graduate school experiences, career building issues, and experiences within the field. Results showed that some women perceive they may not receive the same kind of encouragement in graduate school that male students enjoy and also believe they lack access to the kinds of financing men in administration fields receive. As for career building issues, women look to family members as role models in childhood, perceive themselves as receiving less career counseling, suspect they do not have the same kinds of degrees that men do, perceive a lack of mentors for themselves, and believe they experience career interruptions more often than men. The major barriers women experience in the field include sex role stereotyping, socialization, and sex discrimination. The paper closes by advocating that women pursuing careers in educational administration be encouraged to realistically assess their skills as well as their chances of finding positions within the field. (Author/LD)

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Differential Experiences of Male and Female Aspirants in Public School Administration:

A CLOSER LOOK AT PERCEPTIONS WITHIN THE FIELD

A Paper Presented to the
1979 Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research
Association

by

C. Sakre Oller

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SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GRADUATE STUDENTS IN ONE UNIVERSITY PROGRAM OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

WOMEN	CHARACTERISTICS	MEN
(n = 17 or 74% of those currently enrolled) 37 years old	AVERAGE AGE	(n = 33 or 67% of those currently enrolled) 40 years old
All Caucasian	RACE	30 Caucasian 1 Black 1 Chinese 1 not designated
6% Republican 88% Democratic 6% Independent	POLITICAL AFFILIATION	27% Republican 30% Democratic 24% Independent 18% other (foreign student, none
53% single or divorced 47% married or paired	CURRENT MARITAL STATUS	12% single or divorced 88% married or paired
53% no children 41% have children 14 years or older 6% have children younger than 14 years old	NUMBER OF CHILDREN	12% no children 12% have children 14 years or older 76% have children younger than 14 years old
88% yes (one in administration) 12% no	HOLD A MASTERS?	97% yes (8 in administration) 3% no
94% yes 6% no 6 years on average, range: 1-1/2 years to 12 years	TEACHING EXPERIENCE?	97% yes 3% no 7-1/2 years on average range: 2 years to 22 years
53% yes 47% no 2-1/2 years on average range: 1 year to 4 years	ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE?	76% yes 24% no 7 years on average range: 1 year to 22 years

AERA Presentation, April 1979, by C. Sakre Oller, Sex Equity in Educational Leadership Project.

Let me begin my remarks today by saying that I will be sharing some ideas that have been germinating in my research and interactions with people in the field over the last three years on the Sex Equity in Educational Leadership Project. My thesis is that some aspirants in the field of educational administration hold a number of perceptions that may seriously affect not only their view of the field, but also their future position within the field. These perceptions center on three main areas: first, graduate school experiences; second, career building issues; and third, experiences within the field of administration. I am concerned that some aspirants, particularly female aspirants, may be remiss in assessing not only the capabilities they bring to educational administration, but also their individual chances of finding work in the field. I hope by exploring and discussing these perceptions, we will open up a dialogue and gain further insight into the field of educational administration. My goal is not just to encourage women to go into administration, but to urge them to make better informed career choices about the field.

Before I continue I'd like to pause to say my ideas are of an exploratory nature and are not intended to prove anything. What I am sharing today are perceptions that have arisen either directly in my discussions with people in the field or indirectly through the more traditional survey research I have conducted. Although I will use some specific data from a recent survey of doctoral students at the University of Oregon, this information is intended to clarify, rather than prove, my thesis. I will not go into a detailed description of my study in the short time we have here, other than note my respondents. There are 23 women currently enrolled in the doctoral program; of these, 17 responded to my questionnaire. Of the 49 men enrolled, 33 responded. I have some further summary information on the survey that I will make available after the session to those interested.

Graduate School Experiences

Often the first concern I hear when talking with women aspirants about pursuing a doctorate in educational administration is a fear that their experience might somehow be different from the male students. Two issues seem to arise. First, some women perceive they may not receive the same kind of encouragement the male students enjoy; and second, other women believe they lack access to the kinds of financing men have in administration.

In looking at the first issue of who encourages students to return to the University, I find that men often <u>do</u> have different kinds of encouragement. The

most striking difference is one third of the men were inspired to enroll in the program by a working administrator. While men were promoted by practitioners already in the field--often colleagues of theirs--women were not. Only two women were encouraged by an administrator and in both cases, the administrator mentioned was a woman. For men, the second most critical motivating force appeared to be themselves. As one man put it, "I was motivated to enter the program by looking at this guy in the mirror one morning." I did not receive any similiar statements from women indicating that they were their own primary promoter.

Although as many men as women were encouraged to enroll in the program by University professors, for the women these professors were the most critical motivators. This may be a significant issue when we consider the traditional feud between insiders and outsiders in education. While men were inspired by inside practicing administrators, women were motivated by academics, or what some people consider outsiders in education. For those who didn't note a professor as significant, a variety of other reasons were detailed by women. These ranged from their own administrative experience to the prompting of friends in the field to the enthusiasm expressed by students already in the program. Women made a point of noting that when they were encouraged by someone, that someone nearly always turned out to be another woman--whether a professor, an administrator or a student. As one woman stated,

> Isn't it interesting that the encouragement for my present activity in the program came from women, most of whom were relative strangers, rather than from the men who worked along side of me and indirectly identified me as competent?

Although the perception of the first issue of different kinds of encouragement in graduate school seems to bear out in my data, the second concern of how graduate work is financed did not. In my survey, I found most graduate students fund themselves through many sources. Although some women perceive themselves lacking access to sources available to men, women actually do better proportionately in gaining graduate teaching assistantships at the University than men. Both male and female students appeared to use the benefits of sabbatical or study leave pay at nearly identical rates, as well as relying on their families for support. Contrary to the beliefs of some, only two men in this study benefitted from the GI Bill.

A critical underpinning to these funding sources is men appear to attend graduate school part-time, while continuing to hold down full-time positions in either teaching or administration. Perhaps because they wish to maintain their connections and professional relationships as well as the family's income, men

are holding on to their positions in education. Most of the men in the survey are married with children under fourteen years of age, and many indicated a bind of being both student and providers for their families. All but four of the male respondents have children. As one man forcefully described the double burden, "I will not sacrifice my family's welfare, home and security" to return to school full-time.

Women, on the other hand, attend school under exactly the opposite circumstances. They are more typically full-time students, working mostly on a part-time basis. Although half of the women are married and have children in this study, only one woman has a child younger than fourteen years old. As might be expected, women appear to be picking up on their administrative careers after early parenting years are over.

Building Careers

A second area of perceptions focuses on ways aspirants build their careers. By this I mean: (1) the kind of role models they look to; (2) the kind of career counseling they have; (3) the training and experience they secure for themselves; (4) the mentors they develop; and (5) the career interruptions they might experience. In these areas, I believe women often perceive themselves as disadvantaged when compared to men in building their careers.

In the first point, both men and women in my study indicated that their own family members afforded the best childhood role models when they were growing up. As might be expected, men were likely to mention their fathers as one, if not the most, significant role model. This is interesting given the men were more likely to have fathers in unskilled or skilled positions, as opposed to white collar or professional occupations. More than half of the males had working mothers and these tended to center in white collar or professional positions. For women, their fathers worked in unskilled or skilled positions, as well as white collar and professional occupations. Nearly three quarters of the women had mothers whose main occupation was homemaking. Of those mothers who worked, only two held white collar or professional jobs.

Although parental occupations can prove important to the subsequent occupational choices of their children, a reccurring theme in the literature is that highly motivated professional people are often first or only children in their families. In my survey, sixty percent of the men were in this category, while seventy percent of the women were.

Most significant about role models perhaps is the wider range of models men draw on as compared to women. While women looked to their families, friends and teachers close by, men saw beyond this inner circle to athletes, professionals, former presidents, religious leaders and military superiors for models. I suggest this indicates a broader involvement with the outside world than the females. This also appeared to be reflected in the aspirations they expressed having as children. Women indicated nine possible career choices as youngsters, and half of those mentioned are female sex-typed jobs such as nurse, secretary, nun, teacher or wife. Men indicated a range of twenty different career possibilities.

A second perception about career building is men get more career counseling than women. Yet in this study, only a quarter of the men said they had some kind of counseling, while nearly half of the women had. Several men and several women indicated that they had counselled themselves about career decisions. These people were often the ones who seemed to know the direction they were going already. One man said,"I know what I want and I won't stop until I'm done." Many of these individuals appear to have access to informal counseling with others in the field, through role models or mentors.

For the women who said they had been counselled, many seemed split on the benefits of their experience. Words like "rotten" and "unsatisfactory" are used by some. One female noted, "The counselor told me to drop out of educational administration and was unreceptive to what I wanted." Still others found guidance in focusing on their careers and immediate job decisions. "My choice to go to graduate school for a PhD is a result" of counseling, a female student reported.

Once people choose a career, their subsequent training and experience can be critical to the success in their field. This brings us to a third career concern in administration. Some women suspect that they do not have the same kinds of degrees that men do. But my survey indicates otherwise. Both the men and the women hold Bachelor degrees; fifty percent of both hold their Bachelor in the field of education or related fields. Likewise, both female and male students have obtained Master degrees at about the same percentages. The one difference is that men have begun at the Masters level to choose administration. A quarter of the men received a Master degree in educational administration; none of the women did. Both males and females said they changed to their current career goals when they became more aware of their own skills and capabilities. Throughout their higher education, they continued to parallel each other in choosing education, with the men leaning towards administration earlier. This is interesting given the perception that men, but not women, choose education as a second choice.

Some in education also believe that men do not teach as long as women before they make this switch to administration. This is often cited as another piece of evidence that men are not as committed to an educational career as women. In my study, however, I found the women and men had nearly identical years of experience teaching. In fact, the men had slightly more experience--one year on the average--than women. Nearly a third of the men had over twelve years of experience in teaching, while only two women had taught that long. Often the men indicated that their first years of administrative experience overlapped their last years of teaching.

When looking at administrative experience, few people question that men have more experience on the average than women. But unfortunately, I believe many people assume this gap can be bridged by simply offerring internships and practicum experiences to women. Perhaps this notion reflects an unclear picture of the extent of the gap in experience, at least as it is highlighted in my survey. Although these men and women are approximately the same age, women had considerably less administrative experience than the men. Half of the women had experience, but it's usually in staff positions. Only two of the women had any line experience, and then for only three years.

Men, on the other hand, not only had line experience, they often had worked in a series of line positions, such as vice principal, principal and assistant superintendent. Sixty percent of the men surveyed fell into this category of multiple experiences. Fifty percent of the men had more years of experience than the most experienced woman. These men ranged from seven to 22 years of administrative work, while the most experienced woman had only four years of experience. Not only do the men have more experience, they are at a different level in their careers than the women. Women appeared to view the doctorate as a way into administration; men saw the degree as a stepping stone into the higher levels of administration. Many men indicated a desire to be an assistant superintendent or a superintendent, while women were often still unclear about their goals.

Obviously the problem of gaining experience is not solely related to one's sex. One male student told me he, too, was concerned about the competition in the field because he is inexperienced. His concern seemed to reflect the notion of insiders vs. outsiders again. Those inside are gaining experience; those outside are disadvantaged in the competition by lack of contacts, experience or whatever. Although this male student was concerned about being outside, more often his views are expressed by female aspirants in the field.

A fourth career concern women have is they perceive a lack of mentors for themselves. From the literature we know that many successful executives attribute

their success to a mentor or guide who has aided their career along the way. Women hope the same success will come to them if they can find a respected and well-established guide in the field. In my study, roughly half of the women already had a mentor, while only a quarter of the men did. Some members of both sexes expressed no desire or need for a mentor, preferrring "to make it on their own." Others expressed the hope of finding one. "I want one," said one female, "but so far I have not been able to find an all-around mentor." A man stated, "It would be nice to identify with someone who has a genuine concern for my career." Most women with line experience indicated that they had a mentor; men with experience often seemed to lack a mentor and wanted one.

A final perception about career building is women believe they experience career interruptions more often than men. Usually this is attributed to marriage and parenting responsibilities. Although slightly more women than men indicated they had career interruptions, both mentioned the same reasons. Half of the women claimed interruptions due to marriage and parenting, but a third of the men said the same thing, naming divorce, solo parenting and family responsibilities as the reasons.

But the most significant source of interruptions for men was their schooling. Returning to school or financing their work were listed as major problems for men. This concern might be heightened for men because of the family responsibilities I described earlier. And, although men can benefit from GI funding when they return to school, some tend to forget that they paid a price for that benefit. Three men noted that their mandatory military service affected their career progress.

Experiences in Educational Administration

A recent documented theme in administrative literature is women and the barriers they experience in the field of educational administration. This same research may also have given impetus to the growing perception some women have that they experience <u>more</u> barriers than men do in the field. From the responses I received, I suggest perhaps the difference lies in the <u>kind</u> of barriers people experience, not the quantitiy. Nearly identical percentages of barriers were noted by both females and males.

The major barriers women mentioned were sex role stereotyping, socialization and sex discrimination. As one woman noted,

> Parents, teachers, institutions and fellow workers have different attitudes about what women should work "at" as compared to men. Women are behind due to parenting and have not put in the necessary

> years for promotion. We always have to do a superior job in order to be noticed, whether it's in college courses or in the office. When will we be accepted, so that we can just be average?

While this woman described an external struggle, another woman described an inner one:

> My internalization of what women can do and are supposed to do is my biggest barrier. I learned very early that "good girls" take a back seat. Socialization haunts me to this day!

Men seemed to be "haunted" by other concerns, focusing mainly on job market considerations. While many males noted the state of the economy and the flurry of tax cuts for schools as critical concerns, others indicated the glut of administrators and the shrinking field of education as main issues. Also, a couple of men wrote about district hiring practices. "Most public school districts advocate promotions for hometown persons, which tend to limit opportunities for persons like myself," one wrote. Another believes that districts give preference to out-of-state applicants for the higher levels of administration, thereby limiting the opportunities for Oregonians. As many men as women feared they lacked the necessary experience or confidence to succeed in arriving at their administrative goals.

To test the idea that men are concerned about the effect of affirmative action on their job chances, I noted answers to this question about barriers. Only two men said this was a career barrier for them. One of these men had no experience in administration, but the other had ten years. This last man was told he would not be considered for a position in his district, "not that I'm not qualified, but my sex and skin color are not right."

Yet when men were questioned directly about how they felt about affirmative action, they spoke more negatively of the consequences of affirmative action. One reported,

> Since I am a white male looking for work, I assume it will affect me when I start looking for a position. The "idea" has merit, but my attitude is negative.

Another man presented the other side of the story:

> I think it is needed to produce change, to overcome bias, and to get women to believe in themselves and their abilities. On the average, I feel women make better administrators than men.

Still another concluded:

> I think there is a risk of reverse discrimination, but my experience has been that districts aren't all that anxious to hire women. So probably it's a good requirement.

The perceptions of this last man may be significant. Since the passage of affirmative action, women have not gained the number of administrative positions that some

hoped, or feared, they would. Although women almost unanimously believed the legislation would help them get jobs in the field and men often feared it would hurt <u>their</u> chances, these perceptions appear not to be born out in the recent statistics of who's getting hired. One woman believed that affirmative action "does not have a lot of influence on the number of jobs available to women and minorities in public school or higher education administration." Yet another woman concluded,

> The "good old boy" system of hiring and promoting employees has adapted itself to survive within the confines of affirmative action.

In summary, a number of the perceptions circulating at least among some aspirants in the field of educational administration seem to warrant further investigation. There are certain ramifications for women in the field if they are not receiving encouragement from practicing administrators such as many of the men are. It is also significant that men have much more experience in the field of administration, as well as that men are maintaining their connections within education by working full-time while attending graduate school. If, indeed, women lack career counseling or receive discouraging messages from counsellors, this can have far reaching effects on women entering the field. And, if women are pursuing a doctorate as a means for entry into administration, while men view the degree as furthering an already existent career, this may indicate a difference in how men and women perceive administration and their place within the field.

What I have outlined today is merely meant to illustrate the many issues which remain unclear. I am advocating that educational researchers explore the area of perceptions within the field, so that we may all take a more responsible role when encouraging aspirants, and in particular female aspirants, to enter educational administration. We can only be of help if we encourage women to realistically assess their skills, as well as their chances of finding positions within the field. By clarifying what may be inaccurate perceptions in the area, we may be of some help to these women.